

## Response of the Methodist Church to Churches Together in England's consultation paper on membership

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<b>Status of Paper</b>	Final
<b>Action Required</b>	Decision
<b>Draft Resolutions</b>	109/1. The Council adopts the report as its response to Churches Together in England's consultation paper on membership.

### Summary of Content

<b>Subject and Aims</b>	To respond to a consultation paper for member churches and bodies from CTE about membership.
<b>Main Points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Methodist Church supports the reconsideration of categories of membership in order to respond to some of the opportunities and challenges identified by CTE.</li> <li>• Admission to membership of CTE should be through a process of affirmation.</li> </ul>
<b>Consultations</b>	Chairs and District Ecumenical Officers of Synod Cymru and the Wales Synod regarding categories of membership in Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales.

## Response of the Methodist Church to Churches Together in England's consultation paper on membership

### 1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Methodist Church is grateful to the Directors of Churches Together in England (CTE) for the consultation paper on membership that has been circulated to member churches and bodies.<sup>1</sup> We note that it has been sent to us following an initial discussion at CTE's Enabling Group in March 2015 and that it was developed in the light of that meeting. This response is from the Methodist Council which undertakes ongoing work on behalf of the Methodist Conference, the governing body of the Methodist Church, between its annual meetings.
- 1.2 We recognise the paper's description of 'a new phase of ecumenical life' (§3-5) and are pleased that more churches wish to share in the 'ecumenical conversation'. We affirm our belief that the prayer of Jesus that all his disciples may be one has been heard and that his prayer creates unity. We have committed ourselves to work with ecumenical partners wherever possible and so rejoice in the many, diverse, deepening relationships in which we share locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally. We remain committed both to the search for full visible unity and to exploring with ecumenical partners what that will mean as we seek to be open to the gifts God still has to share with us through our developing relationships.<sup>2</sup>
- 1.3 The four questions at the end of the paper relate to its other sections and we address each one in turn.

### 2.0 Managing membership (§6-8)

- 2.1 We acknowledge with regret that the failure of a significant number of CTE's members to vote on the admission of new members is resulting in 'a cycle of delay and frustration and embarrassment to those who are applying' (§7); we expect it is also a source of frustration and embarrassment to the Directors and Officers of CTE. We agree that this issue needs to be addressed but wonder whether 'varying capacities, styles of administration, and methods of governance' (§7) among CTE members are the only contributory factors.
- 2.2 We recognise that there is likely to be a variety of views among members of CTE as to the significance of their own and others' membership of the ecumenical instrument. Some, however, use membership of CTE as a factor or the basis for making decisions on a variety of matters. The Methodist Church, for example, uses membership of CTE (as well as of Action of Churches Together in Scotland (ACTS), Cytûn: Churches together in Wales, the Free Churches Group, and the Free Church Council of Wales) as the basis of a rota to invite partner churches to appoint some of the associate members of its Conference.
- 2.3 We believe that it is very important that the admission of new members continues to be a process of affirmation through a vote in their favour rather than one based on veto. We,

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A.

<sup>2</sup> See 'Called to Love and Praise' (1999; available at <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-called-to-love-and-praise-1999.pdf>), 'Towards an Ecumenical Strategy' (2001; available at <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf-ecumenical-issues-2001.pdf>), and 'Our Ecumenical Calling: Making a difference together in the twenty-first century' (2009; available at <http://www.methodist.org.uk/downloads/conf09-45-our-ecu-calling-241109.pdf>).

therefore, do not approve of the change of process in §8. Nevertheless, we think it is important to suggest some alternative approaches for consideration.

- 2.4 First, the current process for the member churches to ratify a decision of the Enabling Group to accept a new member does not adapt the concept of 'present and voting'. If the ratification process were time limited (which is part of the suggestion in §8) then the required majority could be determined as a proportion of those who had voted by that date.
- 2.5 Secondly, the vote to ratify the decision of the Enabling Group to accept a new member could take place at its next meeting. If proxy and postal voting were permitted, those member churches not represented at the second meeting could still vote. The required majority could be determined as a proportion of those present through a representative (or by proxy) and voting (at the meeting or by post).
- 2.6 Thirdly, we are aware that the national ecumenical instruments in Britain vary with regard to their categories of membership. We note that Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales has two categories with sub-groups in each.<sup>3</sup> Among the category B members, which have the right to attend and speak at Cytûn's Enabling Group meetings but no voting rights, are 'those churches, denominations and associations of churches ... which either do not fully meet the requirements of Category A membership, or do not wish to take up the duties and privileges of Category A membership'. We also note that ACTS (Action of Churches Together in Scotland) has 'Full Members' and 'Associate Members', the latter 'are neither eligible to stand for election to the Board nor to vote at any Members' Meeting.'<sup>4</sup> We suggest that, in addition to any points raised in connection with §12-16 and §17-18 of the consultation paper, a reconsideration of categories of membership could help to address the issue set out in §7. This may be one of the changes needed to 'mirror the increasing diversity of Christianity in England' (§1).
- 2.7 Fourthly, we are aware that different organisations require different majorities for votes on different kinds of motions or resolutions; in our own discipline, for example, we use simple, 60%, two-thirds, and 75% majorities.
- 3.0 **Governance and accountability (§9-11)**

- 3.1 We agree that CTE is 'rarely a deliberative body' and appreciate the opportunities provided by CTE (including the Enabling Group and triennial Forum) 'to encounter otherness' in our partners (§9); by God's grace, such encounters help us to become more fully ourselves. We believe that mutual accountability is essential if we are, in Charles Wesley's words, to 'build each other up'.
- 3.2 We consider mutual accountability also includes addressing 'questions of governance, representation, and constituency size' (§10) as well as questions of participation in and financial support of CTE. Whilst 40% of CTE's members may make up about 10% of the total Christian population encompassed by its membership (§10), it is a matter of concern to us that over 90% of CTE's funding comes from seven 'historic' funders.

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<sup>3</sup> See paragraph 1.4 of the *Articles of Association of Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales* (available via the link 'Cytûn's Constitution' on <http://www.cytun.org.uk/us.html>). We note that Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) also has two categories of membership, the first with three 'classes' and the second with two (see paragraphs 1.4 and 1.5 of CTBI's *Articles of Association* (available at <https://ctbi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/Articles-of-Association-of-CTBI-.pdf>).

<sup>4</sup> See paragraphs 5 and 6 of the *Articles of Association of Action of Churches Together in Scotland*.

3.3 We recognise the importance of having a Board that is representative of the membership (§11). On the question of ‘systems of different levels of membership’, the paper itself (§16 and §17) and this response raise the possibility of new categories of membership. We think that voting and eligibility to be a Director/Trustee belong to the privileges of ‘full membership’ (cf §17) and that ‘associate members’ should have the right to attend and speak at the Enabling Group.

#### 4.0 The ‘reach’ of membership (§ 12-16)

4.1 Some parts of this section of the paper remind us of the joint work by the Methodist Church and the Church of England that produced *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*.<sup>5</sup> It sought to crystallize some of the major questions about how ‘fresh expressions’ relate to what have been termed ‘inherited’ forms of the Church and to provide a number of pointers as to how together we may grapple creatively with them.<sup>6</sup> Among other things, it explored ‘intensity’ and ‘connectivity’ as ecclesial dynamics, and, from the teaching of the Church of England and the Methodist Church, identified eight essential ecclesial elements by which a particular Christian community can be identified as a church.<sup>7</sup> We suggest that this report may help to resource the on-going discussion in CTE.

4.2 Turning to the particular question relating to this section, we think the categories of membership should be reconsidered and, if any new ones are introduced, clear criteria agreed for all the categories. We have already drawn attention to the categories used by Cytûn: Churches Together in Wales and we think the criteria it uses would help to meet the points raised by CTE’s Enabling Group identified in §16.

#### 5.0 Cessation of membership (§17-18)

5.1 We think that the points raised in this section of the paper indicate again the need for different categories of membership.

5.2 Earlier, we recognised that there may be a variety of views among members of CTE as to the significance of their own and others’ membership and that some use membership of CTE as a factor or the basis for making decisions on a variety of matters. It would be helpful, therefore, to have greater clarity, probably with some examples, of the ‘need to be members of CTE for the recognition it brings’ (§17).

5.3 Whilst the creation of a category of membership to include ‘Churches which are small and unable to be active’ (§17) would be helpful (with a process for the re-categorisation of membership), we think that ‘a process for the cessation of membership’ is also needed. The reasons for re-categorisation and cessation would need to reflect clear criteria for each category of membership; for example, ‘lack of participation’ (§18, B(i)) could be elaborated to include a number of aspects such as attendance at the Enabling Group, voting on applications for membership, and paying a subscription.

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<sup>5</sup> *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican-Methodist Working Party* (Church House Publishing, London, 2012); the report was presented to the Methodist Conference and the General Synod of the Church of England in the summer of 2012 (for the former, see item 39 on <http://www.methodist.org.uk/conference/conference-reports/2012-reports>; for the latter, see *Report of Proceedings 2012: General Synod: July Group of Sessions*, Volume 43 No. 2, pp 119-138 ([https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1527142/july%202012%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1527142/july%202012%20(2).pdf)).

<sup>6</sup> *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, p vii.

<sup>7</sup> See *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, §§6.2, 6.3, and 4.6.1 respectively.

- 5.4 We think that the majority required on a vote for the cessation of membership (§18, B(v)) should be the same as the majority required for admission.
- 5.5 We are open to the possibility that the majority required on a vote for the re-categorisation of membership could be lower than that required for admission to and cessation of membership.

## 6.0 **Conclusion**

In conclusion, we draw together our answers to the four questions we have been asked:

- 6.1 We do not approve of the change of process in §8 and suggest some alternative approaches for consideration.
- 6.2 We think that if new categories are introduced to respond to some of the opportunities and challenges identified in the paper, voting rights and eligibility to be a Director/Trustee should belong to the privileges of 'full membership'.
- 6.3 We think the categories of membership should be reconsidered to respond to issues identified in §§6-8, 12-16, and 17-18 and, if any new ones are introduced, clear criteria agreed for all the categories.
- 6.4 We think that CTE does need a process for the cessation and re-categorisation of membership.

## **\*\*\*RESOLUTION**

**109/1. The Council adopts the report as its response to Churches Together in England's consultation paper on membership.**

## Appendix A

# CHURCHES TOGETHER IN ENGLAND

## A Consultation paper for Member Churches and Bodies

1. Churches Together in England rejoices that we have been able to mirror the increasing diversity of Christianity in England. When we were formed in 1990 we had sixteen members. We now have forty-three. (see Appendix 1). That reflects both patterns of migration, seen in the growth of ethnic Orthodox and black-led Churches, but also the ecumenical maturity expressed by indigenous Pentecostal and charismatic Churches who also seek to make common witness to Christ in our culture by presence, word and deed. We rejoice in that because our first strategic aim is to deepen and enhance relationships between Member Churches.
2. However, as we have grown and developed, a number of questions have arisen which lead the Directors to believe that it is now time to take counsel with the Enabling Group.

### A new phase of ecumenical life

3. We have moved beyond the days of 'classical ecumenism'. We remain deeply and profoundly grateful for its heritage of Christian bodies at international, national and regional level, and all they symbolise of the quest for unity and peace between nations and churches; for the ending of centuries of hatred and mistrust between Christians; and for the creation of over fifty united and uniting Churches across the world.
4. However, the ecumenical world has been enriched by the emergence of the Roman Catholic Church as a committed global ecumenical partner since Vatican II, and by the explosive growth (particularly in the global south) of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity. Immigration has made brought those world developments principally to the High Streets of our cities and towns, but also in some cases to our rural areas too. That, combined with the ecumenical maturing of indigenous English Pentecostalism and some of the community churches founded in the 1970s has altered the English ecumenical conversation decisively.
5. As we look to the future we see encouraging signs of a new, creative openness to partners of other traditions. It is a conversation that cannot be easily categorised, but its many facets could be grouped under the heading 'the new ecumenism'. The ecumenical world in which we find ourselves is bewildering and multiple, yet full of surprises and hope. It is one in which all want to recognise each other as brothers and sisters in Christ, and to share in the Christ's work in contemporary England and beyond. It is one in which that partnership will be expressed in a variety of ways and languages, from co-operation to the search for 'full, visible unity'. For the moment that plurality of understanding about what it means to be 'in Christ' is characteristic of the body of Christ. Churches may have their own individual views about that, and their own distinctive arguments, but viewed objectively, it is clear that 'full, visible unity' is no longer the goal of all members of CTE.

### Managing membership

6. We believe our membership process is robust. Details are given in Appendix 2.
7. As our membership has grown, we have discovered that Churches have varying capacities, styles of administration, and methods of governance. We presently require

75% of our members to vote in favour of new members. It is becomingly increasingly difficult to get votes back from all our members, and the result is a cycle of delay and frustration and embarrassment to those who are applying.

8. We wish to find a way of avoiding this embarrassment whilst safeguarding the integrity of the Instrument and the rights of its members. We therefore suggest the following amendment to the final paragraph of Appendix 2:

‘If the Enabling Group decides to accept the new member, that decision then needs to be ratified by the Member Churches. The Churches will be informed of the decision, and given the opportunity to record their approval or dissent. Unless 25% of the membership vote against within four months, a report will be made to the next Enabling Group that the application has been successful.’

### Governance and accountability

9. CTE is rarely a deliberative body. It is rather a meeting place, a ‘big tent’ or maybe a ‘gazebo’, or maybe ‘an umbrella’. It is a ‘safe space’ and its style is relational. What it intends to do is network and make connections. If it is to remain a ‘safe space’ it needs to encompass the full diversity of theological, ethical and ecclesiological opinions that are present within the spectrum of English Christianity and allow its members the freedom to debate and exchange views. It is not our job to issue statements about divisive issues; it is our role to gather those opinions. As we do so we allow partners to encounter otherness, and in reaction to that to become more fully themselves.
10. If we are to be that kind of space and allow those kinds of opportunities, we need to be robustly accountable. A measure of our success in broadening access to the ecumenical table is that Pentecostal and charismatic Churches and Councils now comprise more than 40% of our membership, and that number will undoubtedly increase. This is a very varied constituency, in size, capacity and style. However, that 40% of our members probably makes up about 10% of the total Christian population which is encompassed by our membership (most are Catholics and Anglicans because of the relative size of those churches). Now that the Churches within this sector are firmly established at the ecumenical table, they themselves are raising questions of governance, representation and constituency size. We are greatly heartened by the increased support which our newer members are giving us – but even given its recent doubling, over 90% of our funding comes from seven ‘historic’ funders.
11. Our view is that we need to recognise that imbalance, yet to trust in the robustness of our governance structures, where the Trustees are appointed by the Enabling Group (the members’ meeting). We might wish to draft a Memorandum of Agreement which states that the Board should, if possible, include members from all the main ‘families’ gathered at the table (represented by the six Presidents), but not move to systems of different levels of membership. We believe that this would enable us to preserve the ‘good health’ of the organisation, but we would welcome any submission from a Member Church holding a different view which might help us discern a better system of accountability.

### The ‘reach’ of membership

12. Despite the fact that the ‘footfall’ of our combined membership is by far the largest of any Christian organisation in England, we are conscious that we are by no means the totality of English Christianity. Many Asian Christians (for example) worship in their own languages within denominations which are already in membership, or are parts of networks which relate to local or regional ecumenism but have no national profile.

13. 'Emergent church' is also a profound reality. Some of this activity is ecumenically grounded because it works through member denominations who are working together in 'Fresh Expressions'. Other forms have been pioneered by individual ministers, or by ecclesial groupings which are not part of the ecumenical family, but now wish to be. That raises a series of difficult questions about discernment. These organisations are generally working at the edge, with the unchurched, and often in areas of multiple deprivation. Traditional theological language and forms of church simply do not work in those contexts, and therefore new ways of being church are being fashioned.
14. That raises interesting questions for an Ecumenical Instrument. Can we identify the point where such a network reaches a point of what we might term 'ecclesial density' which would allow ecumenical partners to recognise it as a mature enough Church for it to enter into partnership with it? That might have to be a process of denominational discernment at local or regional level, which in its turn would aid national discernment. Second, how might an Ecumenical Instrument be able to offer encouragement, support and recognition to a network which is on that journey but not yet at the point where membership is a possibility?
15. We wish to take counsel with our members about this. At present one of our membership requirements is 'national coverage'. Does that continue to make sense in a context of mega-churches on the one hand, and the presence of some large world communions which have just a handful of congregations in England on the other ?
16. Our Enabling Group raised the question of whether we need a fourth category of associate membership. This could be open to several categories:
  - Those missional networks which wish to be recognised by ecumenical partners but who do not yet have sufficient 'ecclesial density' to be recognised as churches
  - Mega-churches which have a national impact, although not a national coverage
  - Large world communions that have a very small number of congregations in England

It would allow some participation and identity with CTE, but not the full privileges of membership, and it would not entail an automatic right of membership with CTBI. Do we need a review of the conditions of membership? (Appendix 2 gives the present conditions). Do you have advice for the Directors about this?

#### Cessation of membership

17. We have a number of Member Churches who are quiescent and who participate very little in CTE's life and activities beyond paying their subscription. The question that the Churches are asked to ponder is whether this is acceptable. We understand fully the difference between the capacity for involvement and having a culture of involvement. Our concern is clearly with the latter. To deal with the former, we would ask the Churches to consider whether we need a membership category to which we can move Churches which are small and unable to be active but which need to be members of CTE for the recognition which this brings. It could be called Associate Membership, or Recognised Churches, or Represented Churches if there were a system by which these churches were represented by others.



18. Should the Churches wish to create a process for cessation, a number of models would doubtless be possible. The following is adapted from Quaker practice and is intended to stimulate discussion.
- A. On the initiative of the Member Church:
- i. If a church feels that its membership of CTE has ceased to have meaning, or for any other reason, it may write to the Board asking to be released from membership.
  - ii. The Board will normally arrange for a visit with the Member Church
    - to share what can be learned
    - to wish the Church well and establish good relations for the future.
  - iii. The Board will make a report to the next Enabling Group which will accept and confirm the cessation of membership (or, if available, a move to a different category of membership).
- B. On the initiative of CTE
- i. The Board may act on its own initiative or at the request of the Enabling Group or of any three Member Churches acting together. The reasons for recommending the cessation of membership of a Member Church are
    - lack of participation to an extent that shows that the membership has no meaning
    - ceasing to meet the membership criteria as expressed in the constitution, rules and basis of CTE.
  - ii. The Board will draw up a procedure for the termination of membership which will include a visit by representatives of the Board and the consideration of an alternative form of association if available.
  - iii. In the case of any dispute an attempt at reconciliation will be made.
  - iv. A report will be made to the Enabling Group and the recommendation of the Enabling Group will be forwarded to the Member Churches for their approval or dissent.
  - v. Unless 25% of the membership vote against within four months, the termination of membership will be returned to the Enabling Group for formal ratification.

Summary of discussion questions for consideration by the Member Churches/bodies

- Do you approve of the change of process in §8?
- Do you have any further advice to offer us about representation and accountability (§11)?
- Do you wish to reconsider our categories of membership (§12-16)?
- Do we need a process for the cessation of membership (§17-18)?

We would be grateful to receive comments by the end of February 2016 which would allow us to report to the March 2016 Enabling Group.

The Revd Dr David Cornick  
General Secretary,  
Churches Together in England

**Appendix 1: Churches in Membership of Churches Together in England, March 2015**

Antiochian Orthodox Church  
Apostolic Pastoral Congress  
Armenian Orthodox Church  
Assemblies of God  
Baptist Union of Great Britain  
Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales  
Church of England  
Church of God of Prophecy  
Church of Scotland (Presbytery of England)  
Churches in Communities International  
Congregational Federation  
Coptic Orthodox Church  
Council of African and Caribbean Churches UK  
Council of Lutheran Churches  
Council of Oriental Orthodox Christian Churches  
Elim Pentecostal Church  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of England  
Evangelische Synode Deutscher Sprache in Großbritannien  
Exarchate of Orthodox Parishes of the Russian Tradition (Ecumenical Patriarchate)  
Free Church of England  
Ground Level  
Ichthus Christian Fellowship  
Independent Methodist Churches  
International Ministerial Council of Great Britain  
Joint Council for Anglo-Caribbean Churches  
Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (Indian Orthodox Church)  
Mar Thoma Parishes in Europe (COMPE)  
Methodist Church  
Moravian Church  
New Testament Assembly  
New Testament Church of God  
Oecumenical Patriarchate  
Pioneer  
Redeemed Christian Church of God  
Religious Society of Friends  
Ruach Network of Churches  
Russian Orthodox Church (Moscow Patriarchate)  
Salvation Army  
Transatlantic Pacific Alliance of Churches  
Unification Council of Cherubim and Seraphim Council of Churches (Europe Chapter)  
United Reformed Church  
Wesleyan Holiness Church

Observer: Seventh-day Adventist Church

## **Appendix 2: The membership process, March 2015**

'Churches Together in England' is a community of churches who have heard the call to unity in Christ, and who are committed to that journey by sharing fully in the process towards the form such unity eventually takes. Those who seek to join CTE will be those who want to share that goal, and our membership processes reflect that.

1. A Church or Association of Churches shall make a formal written application for membership, sponsored by two of the existing Member Churches.
2. The Trustees will appoint from within the existing membership a Scrutiny Group composed of members from at least three of the member Churches, and may include representatives from the sponsoring Churches. The Scrutiny Group shall be charged with the task of entering into dialogue with the applicant Church, establishing an understanding of its ecclesiology and common life, and reporting in written form to a subsequent meeting of the Enabling Group.
3. In its decision the Enabling Group will normally consider four basic criteria which will be the basis of the Scrutiny Group's report, namely:
  - a. The applicant Church's demonstrable ability to subscribe to or manifest faith in accordance with the Basis and Aims of Churches Together in England.
  - b. The applicant Church's ability to demonstrate evidence of ecumenical engagement and commitment through (for example) partnership in mission locally, good relationships between partner ecumenical leaders at local, intermediate and national level, active participation in CT groups and a sensitivity to the perceptions of ecumenical partners about their own particular emphases and practices.'
  - c. The applicant Church's demonstration of being organised on at least an English national level.
  - d. The acceptance by the applicant Church of the implications of the 'churches together' model of ecumenical engagement, including its willingness to contribute to the costs of the ecumenical instruments.

If the Enabling Group decide to accept the new member, that decision then needs to be ratified by the Member Churches, 75% of whom must vote in favour. That decision will then be reported to the next Enabling Group.